

Going Dutch with Radio Netherlands International:



Shortwave's True Pioneering Service

By Jeff Chanowitz

The old saying goes, "God may have created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands." With the same determination that allowed the country to be reclaimed from the sea, the Dutch pioneered the development of shortwave and became the first to set up a broadcasting service that could be heard in every part of the world. This pioneering spirit is reflected today in the creative and exciting programs of Radio Netherlands: the Dutch International Service.

From Witte Kruislaan, which is RNI's aircraft shaped headquarters in Hilversum, over 330 employees work hard to produce programming in nine different languages including Dutch, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Indonesian, Spanish, and Sranon Tongo (the language of the former Dutch colony Surinam). In addition to its news bureau at Hilversum, Radio Netherlands also uses over 80 correspondents abroad to ensure full coverage of late breaking events throughout the world.

Historical Background

It might be surprising that the Netherlands, a tiny country on the northwestern edge of Europe, has an international service which rivals the likes of BBC and Radio Deutsche Welle. Yet, the colonial heritage of the Netherlands, which has played a key role in the country's outward looking philosophy, has also influenced the development of its shortwave service.

Formed in 1648, the United Provinces rebelled against Spain and established what is now the Netherlands. Being a land reclaimed from the sea, the Dutch had few natural resources and established fleets of ships which traded and established colonies around the globe. Wanting to communicate with these colonies in an expeditious manner, in March of 1927 the Philips Company laboratories established a 25-kilowatt experimental transmissions to the Dutch East Indies (today called Indonesia) on station PJCC.

For a while, the broadcasts received no confirmation. Then, while scanning the airwaves one evening, A.C. de Groot, a Dutch ham living on the island of Java, was surprised to hear a voice announcing, "Hello, Dutch East Indies. This is PJCC, the shortwave transmitter of the Philips Laboratories in Eindhoven, Holland." The next day Groot went to the telegraph office and sent a message to Eindhoven stating, "Radio telephone sounds great." PJCC had proved that shortwave was a viable means of providing expedient communications between the Netherlands and its colonies.

Acutely aware of the medium's potential, Philips continued developing new shortwave transmitters and receivers during the 20's and 30's. Yet, on May 10, 1940, the importance of shortwave became even more evident as German troops attacked and occupied the Netherlands. Forced into exile in England, the government set up "Radio Oranje," so named for the constitutional monarchy which has ruled the Netherlands since the 1600's. Using facilities of the BBC (located in London), the broadcasts of Radio Oranje were extremely successful in informing the public and helping to sustain underground resistance to the Nazi occupation.

In 1944, the former director of Radio Oranje, Henk Van Den Broek, returned from London bringing the influence of the BBC to the newly liberated Netherlands. He was determined to establish an international service. By 1946, transmitters in Huizen, Netherlands, and Bashoso, Indonesia, gave Radio Netherlands the first broadcast service which truly encompassed all parts of the globe.

In order to ensure that the service would not degenerate into a propaganda tool, the Dutch parliament set down a number of statutes mandating that Radio Netherlands should present the broadest and fairest possible picture of the Netherlands, maintain ties with Dutch nationals abroad, and promote peaceful international relations and cooperation. Additionally, the programming at RNI also aims to promote such concepts as "freedom of speech and respect for the rule of law and the individual regardless of nationality, creed, or color."



Courtesy Radio Netherlands

Radio Netherlands' new link with the Caribbean: Panamsat uplink on top of broadcasting center in Hilversum.

Radio Netherlands's Unique Programming

Being close to England, it's not surprising that English is Radio Netherlands' largest foreign language service. Started in 1947 under the title "News from Netherlands," the English service provided broadcasts of news and commentaries on a daily basis. Over the years, the broadcasts have expanded to include news analysis and features beamed to all parts of the world, including 55 minute broadcasts beamed to North America daily.

Radio Netherlands' 16-member English language service is headed by British ex-patriate, Jonathan Marks. During a conversation from Hilversum, Marks described the service's unique programming strategy. Marks stated, "We have looked fundamentally at why people have listened to our programming... We think that our specialized programming attracts different audiences." To off-set RNI's limited funding, it has built its audience through airing targeted programming, thus providing a multitude of diverse features unrivaled by any service of its size.

On a daily basis, each broadcast starts with a news bulletin, followed by "Newslines"—a review and analysis of current events, features, commentaries, and breaking news presented by a team of correspondents. Newslines are then followed by a 30-minute feature program. One of Radio Netherlands' more popular features is "Happy Station." Hosted by Tom Meyer, the program presents a variety of music, announces birthdays and holds contests. Begun in 1928, the program is the longest running feature on shortwave.

Documentaries in June will focus on issues from Africa and Asia; then in July attention will shift to the Dutch athletes entering the Summer Olympics. "Let's Get to Business" is a new way of looking at business and trade: Instead of financial tallies, it focuses on the Dutch products and services which may already be a part of your daily life.

"East of Edam" is another new program presenting a mix of national and international stories, book reviews, music and interviews. A regular spot in the program, "On Safari in Holland," will explore unusual and hidden corners of the country.

In its third year, "Sounds Interesting" is hosted by Pete Meyers and profiles the sights and sounds of Holland. The program also responds to audience questions by calling listeners who have written or called in on the Radio Netherlands' answering machine.

Media Network's Jonathan Marks

One of the most popular features and arguably the most successful DX/media program on shortwave is "Media Network." Jonathan Marks is the host/producer and describes the program as "the combined effort of a network of monitors abroad, active listeners in Holland, and the *Radio/TV Handbook* staff contributing to the

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program." He adds, "I'm the jigsaw man in charge of piecing the puzzle together." With only 30 minutes of program time weekly and 50-minutes worth of material being received from over 180 monitors across the globe, Marks, who is the sole member of the "Media Network" staff, spends hours sifting through media information before bringing listeners the latest news on the air.

The key component to the program's success has been Marks' DX background. Starting at age 14, Marks was an avid shortwave listener who enjoyed QSLing and entering listener's contests. One of his memorable DX experiences involved receiving a package from Radio Baghdad after writing a letter requesting information about the station. The package had arrived at Heathrow airport in London and was held in customs with a 20 dollar duty attached and no information about the contents of the package. Marks, who at his young age had no money of his own, convinced his reluctant father to pay the customs duty. As it turned out, the package only contained Iraqi dates, which could have been bought for a lot less than 20 dollars in London. Understandably, his father was not happy.

Yet, Marks continued to write to shortwave stations, and his big break came when he won a free trip to Vienna in a contest sponsored by Radio Austria. After the trip, he decided to take a year off between high school and university

studies to move to Austria. There he helped out for 12 months on and off the air with RAI's DX program "Radio Panorama," which was and still is hosted by David Hermges. Following university studies, Marks went to work for BBC Monitoring and then was asked by Radio Netherlands to join their service as a producer and announcer.

Ironically, Marks was put in charge of closing down "DX Jukebox," which was Radio Netherlands listener's program at the time, and starting up a science program in its place. Upon examining the program, Marks discovered that the old format, which contained music, DX news and technical information, had become outdated. Instead of closing down "DX Jukebox," Marks says, "We changed from a pure hobbyist magazine to a program that interested hobbyist and professionals as well." May 7, 1981, saw the debut of "Media Network," a specialized format that included no music, but more information about international broadcasters, international broadcasting, and the communications world.

Covering topics that have included the examination of the former studios and staff of the now defunct Radio Berlin International and communications within breaking current events such as the Gulf War, the attempted Soviet coup, and the Yugoslavian Civil War, "Media Network" has continued to evolve and break new ground in its reporting on the media world. In addition to 30-minute broadcasts, "Media Network" also offers free pamphlets and publications to listeners on subjects ranging from buying receivers to information about shortwave propagation. Listeners can write to Radio Netherlands or call the "Media Network Line" at 011 (in the U.S.) 31-35-724-248. For PC owners, "Media Network" can also be electronically downloaded via ANARAC BBS at +19133451978.

Along with providing extensive media news, the service also wants to encourage audience feedback, which Radio Netherlands describes as "input to our output." Listeners can receive QSLs or the Radio Netherlands newsletter, which provides information on programming and scheduling, by writing to Radio Netherlands, P.O. Box 222, 1200 JG Hilversum, The Netherlands.

Experimenting with New Technologies and Distribution Systems

Radio Netherlands' sea-side location and high-powered transmitters provide excellent quality signals for most DXers located in North America. With new transmitters recently built in Flevoland Polder, Radio Netherlands broadcasts with four 500-kilowatt and one 100-kilowatt

Current Program Line-Up

Name of Feature Program	Times of Transmission (UTC)
Research File: Science	Monday: 0750, 0950, 1350, 1550, 1750, 1950 Tuesday: 0050, 0250, 0350 Thursday: 0850, 1450, 1850 Friday: 0150
Let's Get to Business/CD Dutch/Sports Digest:	Monday: 0850, 1450, 1850
Mirror Images: Arts & culture in Europe	Tuesday: 0750, 0950, 1450, 1850 Wednesday: 0050, 0250, 0350
No Boundaries: Development	Tuesday: 0150, 0850, 1350, 1550, 1750, 1950
Feature Documentary:	Wednesday: 0750, 0950, 1350, 1550, 1750, 1950 Thursday: 0050, 0250, 0350 Friday: 0850, 1450 Saturday: 0150
Music Documentary:	Wednesday: 0150, 0850, 1450, 1850
Media Network: Communications	Thursday: 0150, 0750, 0950, 1350, 1550, 1750, 1950 Friday: 0050, 0250, 0350
Rembrandt Express: European social affairs	Friday: 0750, 0950, 1350, 1550, 1750, 1950 Saturday: 0050, 0250, 0350
Airline Africa:	Friday: 1850 Saturday: 0850, 1450, 1750, 1950
Sounds Interesting: Listener participation	Saturday: 0750, 0950, 1350, 1550, 1850 Sunday: 0050
Happy Station:	Sunday: 0135, 0735, 0935, 1335, 1535, 1735, 1935 Monday: 0035, 0235, 0335
East of Edam: Potpourri	Sunday: 0235, 0335, 0835, 1435, 1835 Monday: 0135

backup transmitter. Additionally, Radio Netherlands also relays its signal via stations in Madagascar and in Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles.

Yet, despite the ability to reach most of the world with a signal of good quality, Radio Netherlands continues to expand its distribution system. Currently, the service is planning to market its Spanish and Dutch programming to local stations in the Caribbean and South America, and the development of DAB and satellite systems could become reality in the near future. However, the biggest changes for Radio Netherlands have come from a new experiment which began on March 29th.

Summarizing this new approach, Marks stated, "The future of Radio Netherlands will be different in different target areas." The new transmission policy includes scheduling two consecutive hours of programming to Asia instead of three different hours in order to minimize losing its audience when it switches the languages it broadcasts. In Latin America, where cable television is having an impact, additional distribution methods will be explored. Yet, Marks added, "Shortwave will continue to be very

important medium."

The importance of shortwave was demonstrated when Radio Netherlands cut its 10 am broadcast to Great Britain. Despite being at a very odd time, the service received 2,500 letters of complaint, and the Dutch embassy in London was swamped with angry calls. Stated Marks, "I was amazed at the response from English listeners and the enormous lengths to which people will go to listen, like buying a timer and taping the broadcast."

For the future, Radio Netherlands will continue to innovate in the face of increased competition for shortwave listeners. Marks commented, "Today, we are looking at how the media is changing, what the competition is doing, and what the domestic service is doing in the region to which we broadcast." Despite the fast-changing world of international broadcasting, shortwave listeners can be assured that, with the persistence and tenacity that is typical of the Dutch, Radio Netherlands will continue to provide programming that is indicative of a pioneering broadcaster.



Photos courtesy Radio Netherlands